



## WORKPLACE SAFETY AND HEALTH IN DELAWARE

*From The  
National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health*



### State Profile 2002

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*Delivering on the Nation's promise:  
Safety and health at work for all people through prevention.*

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### The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health

NIOSH is the primary federal agency responsible for conducting research and making recommendations for the prevention of work-related illness and injury. NIOSH is located in the Department of Health and Human Services in the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The NIOSH mission is to provide national and world leadership to prevent work-related illness, injury, disability, and death by gathering information, conducting scientific research, and translating the knowledge gained into products and services. As part of its mission, NIOSH supports programs in every state to improve the health and safety of workers. NIOSH has developed this document to highlight recent NIOSH programs important to workers and employers in Delaware.

### The Burden of Occupational Illness and Injury in Delaware

- In Delaware, there are approximately 393,000 individuals employed in the workforce.<sup>1</sup>
- In 2000, 13 workers died as a result of workplace injuries.<sup>2</sup>
- In 1999, the most recent year for which data are available, the rate of fatal workplace injuries was 3.5 deaths per 100,000 workers—below the national average rate of 4.5 deaths per 100,000 workers.<sup>2</sup>
- In 2000, there were 15,900 nonfatal workplace injuries and illnesses in Delaware.<sup>3</sup>

### The Cost of Occupational Injury and Illness in Delaware

In 1999, the most recent year for which data is available, a total of \$100.2 million was paid for workers' compensation claims by Delaware private insurers and self-insured employers.<sup>4</sup> This figure does not include compensation paid to workers employed in the federal government and also underestimates the total financial burden for private sector businesses, since only a fraction of health care costs and earnings lost through work injuries and illnesses is covered by workers' compensation. Chronic occupational illnesses like cancer are substantially under-reported in workers' compensation systems, because work-relatedness is often difficult to establish.

### How NIOSH Prevents Worker Injuries and Diseases in Delaware

#### Health Hazard Evaluations (HHEs) and Technical Assistance

NIOSH evaluates workplace hazards and recommends solutions when requested by employers, workers, or state or federal agencies. Since 1993, NIOSH has responded to 10 requests for HHEs in Delaware in a variety of industrial settings, including the following example:

### ***Millsboro, Delaware: Potential Exposures to Vapors from Drywall Adhesive***

In 1999, NIOSH responded to an HHE request by employees at a company in Millsboro, Delaware, to evaluate whether drywall hanging exposed employees to vapors from drywall adhesive. Drywall hangers working for the company use the adhesive, along with drywall nails and screws, to affix drywall sheets to wooden wall studs, joists, and rafters in residential homes. NIOSH investigators did not find any over-exposures to individual or combined solvent vapors from the adhesive. Recommendations included removing emptied adhesive tubes from the work area; ensuring hangers work with windows and doors open; switching to a water-based adhesive; and developing a hazard communication program for employees and contractors.

## **Fire Fighter Fatality Investigation and Prevention Program**

The purpose of the NIOSH Fire Fighter Fatality Investigation and Prevention Program is to determine factors that cause or contribute to fire fighter deaths suffered in the line of duty. NIOSH uses data from these investigations to generate fatality investigation reports and a database of case results that guides the development of prevention and intervention activities. Since 1997, there have been three fire fighter fatality investigations in Delaware, including the following recent example:

### ***Delaware: Volunteer Assistant Chief Dies During Controlled-Burn Training***

On April 30, 2000, ten fire fighters from a volunteer fire department were in controlled-burn training at a two-and-a-half-story farmhouse. Their last exercise involved burning the structure from top to bottom. The victim and three other fire fighters went to the attic, where the victim sprayed diesel fuel on debris. The debris was then ignited and all the fire fighters left, except for the victim who, wearing full turnouts and a self-contained breathing apparatus (SCBA), stayed to ensure the fire was burning adequately. After the fire intensified and the victim did not exit, two fire fighters were able to locate him, unconscious on the attic floor, but could not remove him. Shortly after, the attic roof collapsed. After the fire was extinguished, the victim was removed and pronounced dead. NIOSH recommendations to fire departments included ensuring that: a safety officer is appointed during live fire training; a building evacuation plan and proper ventilation are in place before control-burning starts; fire fighters enter hazardous conditions as a team; each fire fighter is equipped with full protective clothing and a SCBA; and flammable or combustible liquids are not used in live fire training.

*Additional information regarding NIOSH services and activities can be accessed through the NIOSH home page at <http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/homepage.html> or by calling the NIOSH 800-number at 1-800-356-NIOSH (1-800-356-4674).*

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<sup>1</sup>U.S. Department of Labor (DOL), Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), Local Area Unemployment Statistics, Current Population Survey, 2000.

<sup>2</sup>DOL, BLS in cooperation with state and federal agencies, Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries, 1999-2000.

<sup>3</sup>DOL, BLS in cooperation with participating state agencies, Survey of Occupational Injuries and Illnesses, 2000.

<sup>4</sup>National Academy of Social Insurance, *Workers' Compensation: Benefits, Coverage, and Costs, 2000 New Estimates*, May 2002.

